

Thorne Smith in the *Wake*: Arno Schmidt's Neglected Recommendation

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In the post-war reception of James Joyce in Germany, the role played by the novelist Arno Schmidt (1914-79) can hardly be overestimated. Starting with his harsh critique of Georg Goyert's translation of *Ulysses* in 1957 (which eventually led to Hans Wollschläger's new translation), Schmidt wrote a number of essays on Joyce which still today have not lost their impact on German readers' conception of Joyce's works, especially *Finnegans Wake*. In contrast to this, Schmidt's readings of the *Wake* have left virtually no traces in Joyce scholarship, and the reasons are quite obvious: being a strongly original writer himself, Schmidt imposed his own eccentric conceptions of the literary work of art on Joyce rather than looking for Joyce's conceptions, and, moreover, Schmidt tried to overcome his "anxiety of influence" by wilfully disparaging Joyce's character, the professional Joyce exegetes, and in part also Joyce's works, especially certain aspects of *Finnegans Wake*.¹ According to Schmidt, the scene of *Finnegans Wake* is laid in Trieste rather than Dublin, and the whole book deals with nothing else but the rivalry of James and Stanislaus Joyce over Nora Barnacle. Although Schmidt's discoveries seem to have been taken seriously by most of his readers in Germany, it is only too natural that the international community of Joyce scholars ignored Schmidt.

Some of Schmidt's incidental discoveries, however, deserve more attention than they have received so far, and one of these is Schmidt's identification of Thorne Smith as a background for at least one passage in the *Wake*. Smith, a popular American novelist of the 1920s and 1930s, is virtually unknown to *Wake* commentators from Glasheen and Atherton to McHugh, and this gave Schmidt a most welcome opportunity to brag with his own knowledge and at the same time ridicule the professional Joyce scholars on the grounds that they did not even notice the most obvious allusions.²

Thorne Smith had been a favourite author of Schmidt's since at least the late 1940s. Several of Smith's novels are to be found in Schmidt's personal library, and allusions to the *Topper* novels in particular can be found in the whole of Schmidt's oeuvre from *Brand's Haide* (1950) through to *Julia* (1979). Schmidt must have been highly attracted by Smith's extremely comical mixture of turbulent plots and burlesque situations, undermined by an underground tendency towards misanthropy and escapism.

Thorne Smith, born in Annapolis in 1892, made a career in the advertising business and started writing in World War I, when, as an editor of the *Naval Reserve Magazine Broadside*, he authored a series of funny stories collected after the war in *Biltmore Oswald* (1918) and *Out O'Luck* (1919). Subsequently he lived in Greenwich Village, published a collection of verse (*Haunts and By-Paths*, 1919), and returned into the advertising business. Thorne Smith did not come into his own, however, until he wrote his best-remembered

novel *Topper: A Ribald Adventure* (1926; with a sequel, *Topper Takes a Trip*, 1932), which was an immediate commercial success and eventually led to its screen adaptation by Norman Z. McLeod, starring Cary Grant, Roland Young and Constance Bennett. (The film versions of the *Topper* novels, however, are rather disappointing to most fans of the books.³) The plot of the novel centers around an aging, henpecked bank clerk, Cosmo Topper, who buys a second-hand sportscar and subsequently has to deal with the ghosts of the former owners, George and Marion Kerby, who have been killed in a road accident but live on in the fourth dimension and are able to materialize for limited periods. Throughout the novel, seemingly driverless cars are racing along the highway, liquids are being poured into nothing in mid-air, and suitcases are floating masterless through hotel halls. Most of Thorne Smith's novels are variations of the basic idea that the characters' nature and appearance are grotesquely disunited: in *Turnabout* (1931) husband and wife change bodies but not personalities; the protagonists of *The Stray Lamb* (1929) and *Skin and Bones* (1933) are transformed into animals and a skeleton respectively; Greek stone statues in a museum are turned into human beings (*The Nightlife of the Gods*, 1931), and a commuter ferry-boat by mistake discharges a group of well-respected citizens in a nudists' camp (*The Bishop's Jaegers*, 1932). The remainder of Smith's novels are: *Dream's End* (1927), *Did She Fall?* (1930), a children's book *Lazy Bear Lane* (1931), *Rain in the Doorway* (1933), and *The Glorious Pool* (1934).⁴ Thorne Smith died in 1934 in Sarasota, Florida, from apoplexy of the heart; an unfinished novel, *The Passionate Witch*, was completed by Norman Matson and published in 1941.

Although allusions to the *Topper* novels can be found in almost all of Arno Schmidt's books, it is only in his Joyce essays that Schmidt gives any details regarding the significance of Smith's works; it seems that when Schmidt discovered traces of Thorne Smith in *Finnegans Wake*, he took this as a most welcome confirmation of his own esteem for the American novelist. In a short essay written in 1964, Arno Schmidt argues that anyone who is irritated by the *Wake* simply suffers from lack of reading: "wird doch z.B. die S. 434 f. sogleich durchsichtig, wenn man THORNE SMITH kennt."⁵ Schmidt's discovery that pages 434 and 435 of *Finnegans Wake* should be read in the light of Smith's books is unfolded in detail in his radio essay "Das Buch Jedermann," written on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Joyce's death.⁶ I would like just to report Schmidt's suggestions, using not only the radio essay but also the facsimile edition of Schmidt's personal copy of the *Wake*⁷; we will, however, have to reject most of these suggestions afterwards.

Thorne Smith in person is present in the "would-do performer, oleas Mr Smuth" (FW 434.35-36), and a few lines down we can spot an "autocart" (FW 434.31) which Schmidt in a marginal note in his *Wake* copy identifies as Topper's important sportscar (formerly owned by the Kerbys). Topper in person appears in "the icepolled globetopper is haunted" (FW 434.12-13): in Smith's book, the pedantic Topper is haunted (albeit affectionately) by the ghost-like vagabond Marion Kerby. Several details of Joyce's text seem to refer to *The Night Life of the Gods*. In "the Smirching of Venus" (FW 435.2-3) a goddess is explicitly named, and the following phrase, "asking with whispered offers in a very low bearded voice" (FW 435.3-4), is wrongly identified by Schmidt as being a quotation from Smith's *Night Life*.⁸ A few lines down Joyce seems to merge the *Night Life* and *The Bishop's Jaegers* into one: "the frecklessness of the giddies nouveautays" (FW 435.11-12) is translated by Schmidt into the "recklessness of the goddess's nudities," thus connecting the godliness of the *Night Life* with the topic of nudism that is to

be found in Smith's later book, and the same combination occurs again in "the undraped divine" (FW 435.14-15). Schmidt in his radio essay also suggests that the "back beautiful" (FW 435.14) is owned by Josephine Duval, heroine of *The Bishop's Jaegers*. The nouns of this book's title, moreover, are mentioned in "Bussup Bulkeley" (FW 435.11) and "always jaeger for a thrust" (FW 435.14) respectively, and the English translation of German *Jäger* is "hunter" (FW 435.14). And one more reference to *The Bishop's Jaegers*: the "artist's model" hidden in "won't you be an artist's moral and pose in your nudies" (FW 435.5) according to Schmidt is van Dyke, a character in Smith's novel.

Unfortunately Arno Schmidt did not have any detailed knowledge of the genetics of *Finnegans Wake*. The passage in which all these possible references occur is part of chapter III.2 of *Finnegans Wake*, a chapter that was put aside by Joyce as early as April, 1926, when all of Thorne Smith's books except *Topper* had not even been written, and the chapter was printed in issue number 13 of *transition* in the summer of 1928, three years before *The Night Life of the Gods* and four years before *The Bishop's Jaegers*. If Schmidt is right indeed in identifying Thorne Smith as a vital source in the *Wake* passage in question, Joyce must have written or at least heavily revised this passage at a comparably late stage and fit the revisions into a text that originally had been considered finished already.

Let us take a close look at the genetics of the passage in question. The following is the final book version of FW 443.27-435.16; I introduce square brackets in order to identify all words and phrases that are still missing in the 1928 *transition*⁹ printing:

. . . Jonas in the Dolphin's Barncar [with your meetual fan, Donveyed Covetfilles, comepulsing paynattention spasms between the averthisment for Ulikah's wine and a pair of pulldoors of the old cupiosity shape]. There you'll fix your eyes darkled on the autocart of the bringfast cable but here till youre martimorphysed please sit still face to face. For if the shorth of your skorth falls down to his knees pray how wrong will he look till he rises? Not before Gravesend is commuted. But now reappears Autist Algy, [the pulcherman and would-do performer, *oleas Mr Smuth,*] stated [by the vice crusaders] to be well known [**to all the dallytaunties**] in and near the ciudad of Buellas Arias, taking you to the playguehouse to see the Smirching of Venus and asking [with whispered offers] in a very low bearded voice, with a nice little [**tiny**] manner and in a very nice little [**tony**] way, won't you be an artist's moral and pose in your nudies as a local esthetic before voluble old masters, introducing you[, left to right the party comprises,] to hogarths [like] and¹⁰ Bottisilly and Titteretto and Vergognese and Coraggio [with their extrahand Mazzaccio, **plus the usual bilker's dozen of dowdycameramen**]. And the volses of lewd Buylan[,] for innocence! And the phyllisophies of Bussup Bulkeley. [**O, the frecklessness of the giddies nouveautays! There's many's the icepolled globetopper is haunted by the hottest spot under his equator like Ramrod, the meaty hunter, always jaeger for a thrust.** The back beautiful, the undraped divine! And Suzy's Moedl's with their Blue Danyboyes! All blah!

This synoptical version clearly shows that Schmidt was partly but not wholly right. Contrary to all expectations, both the "Smirching of Venus" and "Bussup Bulkeley" have been in the text already before Joyce could ever have heard of Thorne Smith, and mysteriously the same is true of the "very low bearded voice" which Schmidt identifies as quotation from the *Night Life*. On the other hand it seems that Joyce realized that the presence of both Venus and a bishop allowed the insertion of Smith-related material into this passage. The insertions that I have put in square brackets in the above

quotation date from at least three different stages of revisions between 1933 and 1937: revisions on marked pages of *transition 13* (JJA 61: 29 and 213); revisions on another (apparently third) set of *transition 13* pages (JJA 61: 356-57 and 566); revisions on two sets of galleys for *Finnegans Wake* (JJA 62: 41-43 and 287-89). For convenience sake, I have used bold-face type in order to identify all insertions that date from Joyce's revisions on the first set of *transitio 13* pages; these first revisions include all the most vital references to Thorne Smith, namely "Mr Smuth" himself and the cluster of references at the end of the passage. Both these insertions can be traced further to sheets number 13 and 10 respectively of a batch of extradraft notes compiled by Joyce in 1933-34 (JJA 61: 130 and 126). These sheets belong to a special part of the batch of notes which consists mainly of units transferred directly from notebooks VI.C.2 and VI.C.3, and these notebooks again have to be dated approximately 1933-34 (see JJA 61: x-xi). It should be noted, however, that in these notebooks, there is no trace of the original notes for the units in question, which makes it appear quite probable that both phrases originate from the very time of Joyce's compiling the extradraft notes.

From all this we may well conclude that Arno Schmidt was basically right in identifying Smithian overtones in "Mr Smuth," "the icepolled globetopper" and "hunter"/"jaeger": when Joyce took notes for these phrases, Smith's books had already been published, and maybe Smith himself was dead already. All of Schmidt's suggestions that deal with *Wake* material not printed in bold-face type in the above quotation, on the other hand, including Schmidt's detection of what he believed to be a direct quotation from Smith, have to be rejected on chronological grounds. Thorne Smith seems to have been discovered late by Joyce, but not too late. Suffice it to say that if the same can be said of Smith's being discovered by the Joyceans, this is entirely owing to Arno Schmidt.

Notes

1. See my article "Arno Schmidt's Utilization of James Joyce: Some Basic Conditions," *James Joyce Quarterly* 30.1 (1992): 85-90.

2. Examples of Arno Schmidt's and also Vladimir Nabokov's tendency to ridicule professional Joyce scholarship in order to install their own conception of Joyce and his work can be found in my recent article "Die Gunst des Verlesens: Zur Frage des Umgangs von Nabokov und Schmidt mit Joyce," *Zettelkasten 14: Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft der Arno-Schmidt-Leser* 1995, ed. Gregor Strick (Frankfurt am Main: Bangert und Metzler, 1995) 147-72.

3. I am indebted to Rudi Schweikert for this and more information.

4. A bibliographical listing is given by Peter Arendt, "Ach, ich hör auf: Sie kennen das Alles nicht': Einige Anmerkungen zu Thorne Smith," *Schauerfeld: Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft der Arno-Schmidt-Leser* 8.2 (1995): 5-12. In 1980, six of Smith's novels have been reprinted by Ballantine Books, New York, but all are out of print again.

5. Arno Schmidt, "Meine Bibliothek," *Der Platz, an dem ich schreibe: 17 Erklärungen zum Handwerk des Schriftstellers* (Zürich: Haffmans, 1993) 132. English translation: "Page 434f., for example, becomes immediately transparent, as soon as you know THORNE SMITH."

6. Arno Schmidt, "Das Buch Jedermann: James Joyce zum 25. Todestage," *Bargfelder Ausgabe* (Zürich: Haffmans, 1991) II.3: 245-47.

7. *Arno Schmidts Arbeitsexemplar von Finnegans Wake by James Joyce* (Zürich: Haffmans, 1984): 434-35.

8. In the margin of his copy of the *Wake*, Schmidt locates this quotation on page 157 of his copy of *The Night Life of the Gods* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960). Unfortunately I have not been able to obtain a copy of this edition yet. Anyhow, we

will see below that for reasons of chronology, this phrase simply cannot be a quotation from Thorne Smith.

9. James Joyce, "Continuation of a Work in Progress," *transition* 13 (July 1928): 9. See *JJA* 61: 29.

10. *transition* 13 reads: "hogarths and Bottisilly." In the process of revision, Joyce changes this into "hogarths like and Bottisilly" (*JJA* 61: 356), but the final wording is "hogarths like Bottisilly" (*FW* 435.7).